

# Ads to adorn Phila.'s new shelters, benches

## A major message from street 'furniture'

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It will be one of the Street administration's last acts: awarding a 20-year contract - likely the largest in Philadelphia history - that will change the look of city streets and pump millions into the city treasury.

The subject is "street furniture" and no, it's not the kitchen chairs Philadelphians put out after a snowstorm to save their parking spot.

City officials are now weighing proposals from three companies to design, install and maintain - for the next two decades - hundreds of new bus shelters, newsstands, trash receptacles, public toilets and benches.

In return, the winning contractor will get the chance to sell advertising in places that so far have been ad-less.

Officials say they want to have a recommendation for City Council in September.

"Our intent is to try to get some consistency throughout the city," said Frank Punzo, deputy commissioner of public property.

"The city's existing street furniture was installed over many years and is not of uniform quality and visual appeal."

In fact, the city RFP, or request for proposals, asks the three bidders for "coordinated designs that create a signature Philadelphia look and provide a more cohesive and less cluttered streetscape."

If a "signature look" seems a stretch for a public toilet, those in the trade are ready to oblige, hiring international designers and polling citizens on preferences.

And, given the financial stakes, why not?

Consider the proposal awarded last year by New York City to the Spanish company Cemusa Inc.

Cemusa pays New York City \$1 billion over the next 20 years - including an immediate down payment of \$50 million - for the right to supply New Yorkers with 3,300 bus shelters, 20 new public toilets, replace 33 newsstands and maintain them over the contract's life.

For Cemusa, the deal means more than \$2 billion from ads it sells and installs on the street furniture.

Punzo said he cannot divulge how much money city officials hope to get but said "substantially, it's close to what you've read in articles about New York and other cities."

The city has been including revenue from "strategic marketing partnerships," including ad revenue from street furniture, since 2003. The five-year financial plan for fiscal years 2008 to 2012, which Mayor Street unveiled in February, includes \$9 million in street-furniture ad revenue, including \$1 million in 2008.

"It's really a win-win-win for any municipality," said Martin J. McDonough, president of Wall USA Inc., the Boston-based subsidiary of the German multinational Wall AG. "The public gets well-designed street furniture . . . the municipality gets maintenance and a revenue stream for the city."

Wall USA, which in 2001 won the 20-year street-furniture contract in Boston, is one of three companies that responded to Philadelphia's RFP and now has a demonstration model of its patented self-cleaning public toilet outside City Hall.

The other companies vying for the city contract are CBS Outdoor Inc., a subsidiary of the entertainment giant, which has the bus-shelter ad contract with Philadelphia that expires Dec. 31; and joint venture Clear Channel/Interstate Philadelphia L.L.C.

The Clear Channel joint venture, said Martina Schmidt, president of Clear Channel Adshel, the company's New York-based street furniture unit, has Clear Channel Outdoor Inc. as managing partner, with Interstate Outdoor Advertising L.P. of Cherry Hill and Cárdenas-Grant Communications L.L.C., the company formed in 2004 by Luz Cárdenas and Barbara Grant, two former press aides to Mayor Street.

A CBS Outdoor spokesman said the company does not comment on proposals under consideration.

Not everyone believes that the program will be the "win-win-win" proposition that the city and bidders predict.

"I think our greatest fear is that the city will focus on the needs of the advertisers rather than the public," said Mary Cawley Tracy, president of SCRUB, or Society Created to Remove Urban Blight.

Tracy's group, founded in 1990, has sued outdoor-advertising firms - Clear Channel and Interstate included - to force them to remove illegally erected billboards.

Although the RFP stipulates that areas around culturally significant institutions such as Logan Circle will not have street furniture carrying commercial ads, Tracy said she remained worried that the program would create a new wave of advertising in public spaces where there had been none.

"We spent years trying to get rid of all the benches with advertising on them because they were so ugly," Tracy said.

City officials believe there is a middle ground and that their 40-page RFP has safeguards to prohibit tasteless ads near sensitive historic or cultural institutions.

Paul R. Levy, president of the Center City District, the organization founded to improve and maintain the

cleanliness and safety of downtown areas most used by tourists and workers, called the city RFP "a balancing act."

The Center City District, which is funded by a surcharge on Center City property owners, has already done extensive improvements such as the city wants to undertake.

Levy said that when the city broached the idea several years ago, he and his staff met with the city and outlined all the items the district had installed or maintained, and was promised those items would not be touched.

The Center City District is one of seven entities helping Punzo evaluate the three proposals. "It's really a matter of balance," Levy said. "It can all be done very tastefully, but the way it's done can also offend a lot of people."

Wall USA's McDonough maintains that comprehensive street-furniture contracts have little relationship to billboard advertising.

McDonough said the ad posters are smaller, usually no more than four feet by six feet. The ads are backlit, which improves public safety at night. And public-service ads are included with commercial ads.

"In Boston, we have given away over \$1 million in public-service ads," McDonough said.

There is also the not inconsiderable matter of maintenance in an urban setting where vandalism and the elements take a big toll. In Boston, McDonough said, they annually spend \$80,000 replacing broken glass in transit shelters.

Wall USA factory-trains its workers, McDonough said. In Boston, he added, the company has 11 unionized workers doing daily maintenance and cleaning street furniture.

"Street furniture is a new concept for the U.S. but it's been in Europe for years," McDonough said. "It's a European concept, adapted for U.S. markets over the last 10 years, and it's absolutely perfect for our cities."

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## Philadelphia "Street Furniture"

Philadelphia's request for proposals to provide "street furniture" for 20 years includes:

**Transit shelters.** A total of 272 existing shelters will be replaced in the contract's first year and 150 new shelters installed in a second phase yet to be negotiated. Eleven shelters will be retained on Chestnut Street, between Seventh and 17th Streets, that have art installations instead of ads. They were created during the city's Chestnut Street Reconstruction Project. Twenty-six other shelters near cultural institutions may carry only noncommercial cultural advertising.

**Public toilets.** At least 10 automatic self-cleaning public toilets will be installed in the first phase. The contractor will collect revenue from a public-use fee. The city will distribute tokens to homeless people so they can use the toilets.

**Newsstands.** Ninety newsstands in Center City will be replaced with new ones owned by the contractor but operated by city-licensed members of the Center City Newsstand Association. The contractor will earn

income from selling ad space on newsstands, which is not allowed now.

**Advertising kiosks.** The proposal calls for an unspecified number of two- and three-sided ad kiosks, some possibly with electronic displays and touchscreens. The contractor must justify utilizing kiosks rather than ads on benches and other street furniture.

**Honor-box corrals.** Groups of newspaper and circular honor boxes in Center City will be relocated to designated corrals, similar to those installed by the Center City District. Ninety new corrals will be installed in Center City in the second phase.

**Benches.** There will be an unspecified increase in the number of public benches in Center City that will produce revenue from ads or corporate sponsorship.

**Trash receptacles.** About 1,800 trash receptacles will be replaced with new ones that carry ads and public information.

**Performance.** The city must be able to forward complaints to the contractor 24 hours a day. Repairs or replacement of damaged furniture must be done within 24 hours.

**Ownership.** During the 20-year contract, street furniture will be the contractor's property. At the end of the contract, it will revert to the city without further compensation. - *Joseph A. Slobodzian*

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