



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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Long Beach, CA 90802

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March 3, 2016

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS
City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Conclude the public hearing and recommend that City Council adopt the proposed zoning code amendment, changing the way that Caltrans "credits" may be used for development of billboards adjacent to landscaped freeway segments, and accept Categorical Exemption 16-026. (Citywide)

APPLICANT: City of Long Beach, Department of Development Services
333 W. Ocean Boulevard, 5th floor
Long Beach, CA 90802
Application No. 1602-05

DISCUSSION

On June 17, 2014, the City Council adopted ORD-14-006, which revised the City's existing zoning regulations for off-premise signs (billboards) (Exhibit A – Current Billboard Ordinance). City Council established a number of major changes in this new Billboard Ordinance, including a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requirement for all new billboards, allowing for new electronic billboards and conversion of existing static billboards to electronic, and a "cap-and-replace" billboard takedown requirement.

Previously, billboard projects had been allowed "by right." If the project met code requirements for size and location, a permit was issued. This process, combined with a lack of zoning controls on billboards in the 1940s through the 1970s, resulted in the current pattern of billboard development in the City (Exhibit B – Map of Existing Billboard Locations, Zoning, and Buffers). The goal of the 2014 Billboard Ordinance was to incentivize removal of billboards from areas of the City where they are not an appropriate land use, particularly residential areas and mixed-use commercial/residential corridors. The CUP requirement makes each project subject to discretionary review to assure a higher level of quality. Also, electronic billboards, whether new or converted, had previously been prohibited. They are now allowed, subject to zoning location requirements, the CUP process, and the "cap-and-replace" system. "Cap-and-replace" requires that for each new billboard (or existing billboard converted to electronic), other existing billboard sign area must first be removed from within the City at a specified ratio, depending on the type of project (4:1, 6:1, or 8:1). The takedown requirement is measured in square feet of billboard area, and not in individual billboards.

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This new Billboard Ordinance has been successful to date, with two existing double-sided 14-foot by 48-foot billboard sites (a total of four faces at 672 square feet each) converted to electronic, and 37 nonconforming billboards removed (a total of approximately 11,000 square feet). One additional double-sided 14-foot by 48-foot electronic billboard conversion has been approved, but yet not built, with 11 existing billboards totaling 5,376 square feet scheduled to be removed from within the City before it is built. Two more billboard projects are currently pending entitlement, and would, if approved, result in the removal of at least 9,880 square feet of additional nonconforming billboard area within the City.

Planning staff's primary goal with the new Billboard Ordinance is to accelerate the removal of nonconforming billboards from within the City. The current ordinance provides an incentive for this removal to occur by allowing billboard companies to place new electronic billboards, or convert existing static billboards to electronic, in areas where this would be appropriate, contingent upon compliance with the removal requirements. In order to maintain the current momentum and continue to allow billboard projects that result in the removal of existing nonconforming billboards, Planning staff is proposing a minor amendment to further optimize the Billboard Ordinance.

The current Billboard Ordinance is tightly crafted to achieve specific goals, while avoiding unintended consequences or a rush of billboard development through unforeseen loopholes. However, in one area, staff has found that the ordinance is too strict to achieve the stated goal of nonconforming billboard removal. It prohibits development of new billboards adjacent to (meaning within 660 feet of) Caltrans-designated landscaped freeway segments using Caltrans-issued credits or "chits" received for removing billboards elsewhere adjacent to Caltrans-designated landscaped freeway segments. These credits could come from landscape-adjacent billboard removal anywhere in the State, not only Long Beach. This prohibition was intended to prevent a rush of billboard proposals in inappropriate locations adjacent to designated landscaped freeway segments in the City.

However, this potential scenario has not materialized, and in fact, staff has found that the prohibition on use of these Caltrans credits is preventing the approval of billboard projects that are otherwise compliant with code in all other respects, are appropriately-sited, and would result in significant nonconforming billboard removal from within the City if allowed. For these reasons, staff is proposing to amend the Billboard Ordinance to allow the use of Caltrans-issued credits for billboards adjacent to landscaped freeway segments, in line with what is allowed by State law (Exhibit C – Draft Ordinance).

This amendment would not in any way relieve billboard developers of compliance with all other applicable zoning restrictions. A new or converted billboard would still need to be located in the appropriate zoning district (regional commercial or industrial), fronting on a major arterial or higher street classification, and would still need to comply with all distance and spacing requirements, as well as all takedown requirements under the cap-and-replace system. These requirements would continue to preclude billboard development on the entire length of the 605 freeway in Long Beach, which is adjacent to residential and park zoning districts, as well as most of the 405 freeway, which is also adjacent to residential zoning districts. Portions of the 91 and 710 freeways that are adjacent to residential zoning districts also would be unaffected. Only certain portions of the 91 and

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405 freeways would be affected by this change. Staff has found that these areas are appropriate for new billboard development and would further the City's goal of achieving removal of nonconforming billboards, if new billboard projects were approved.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend that City Council adopt the amendment to the Billboard Ordinance as proposed.

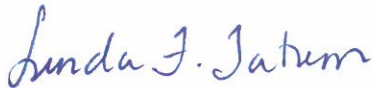
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

A Notice of Public Hearing was published in the local newspaper of record, as required for a Citywide zoning amendment, on February 18, 2016, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 21.21 of the Zoning Regulations. Planning staff has received no comments, inquiries, or statements from the public as of the writing of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In accordance with the guidelines for implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Categorical Exemption 16-026 was issued (Exhibit D – Categorical Exemption CE-16-026).

Respectfully submitted,



LINDA F. TATUM, AICP
PLANNING BUREAU MANAGER



AMY J. BODEK, AICP
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

AJB:LT:CT:sk

Attachments: Exhibit A – Current Billboard Ordinance
 Exhibit B – Map of Existing Billboard Locations, Zoning, and Buffers
 Exhibit C – Draft Ordinance Amendment
 Exhibit D – Categorical Exemption CE-16-026