



Legislation Text

File #: 11-1252, **Version:** 1

Recommendation to request the amending of the Long Beach Municipal Code related to Billboards as follows:

- A) Request City staff to prepare an Environmental Impact Report to study the aesthetics, land use, energy usage, and traffic safety impacts of digital billboards, with a particular emphasis on understanding how light trespass could impact residents' homes and sleep should this ordinance take effect; and
- B) Department of Development Services to report back on every possible monetization tool available to the City from billboards.

Billboards have the potential to create significant environmental impacts on our residential neighborhoods and communities. Although the new digitals would for the most part be located on major arterial streets, in many areas these billboards would nonetheless still light up private residences.

We can learn from the City of Los Angeles mistakes. An article in the L.A. Weekly about the disturbance that ensued in the City of Los Angeles when digital conversions were allowed to take place is instructive. It quotes one Venice resident, Mindy Taylor-Ross, who had to live with the impacts of a digital billboard: "It flashes through my window all night long. . . . My bedroom and bathroom change color and intensity with the billboard. I can see it every night in bed."

The then-President of the Los Angeles City Council, Eric Garcetti told the New York Times, "It was probably a mistake." A week later, he went further, telling the L.A. Weekly, "It was a really bad decision," in which he was "blinded" by a promise that some illegal billboards in his own area, Echo Park, would be removed. In short order, residents of Los Angeles demanded environmental review of these digital billboards and the Los Angeles City Council took a step back and banned digital billboards altogether.

Given what we know about the Los Angeles experience, the fact that Los Angeles is now embroiled in costly litigation with Clear Channel and CBS to have some of the worst-offending digital billboards come down, our decision to approve digital billboards should give us great pause. At minimum, we need to fully understand the environmental consequences of this ordinance.

In the City of Long Beach when fixing streets and sidewalks, we direct our resources to improve the worst areas first. By doing so, over time we improve the quality of life of the residents in Long Beach. Here we have an opportunity to identify the worst blighted billboards and we can create a policy to remove them first over other static billboards that do not have a negative impact. The City Council should consider opportunities to create a sustainable fund from the digital billboards that pays for and removes the worst blighted billboards first. This can be achieved with the Nexus study for fees and possible revenue sharing opportunities for digital billboards.

Furthermore, we speak of opportunities for removing blight from our city yet not all neighborhoods are the same as where the blighted billboards are located. Some Districts might be left out of participating and removing blighted billboards only because they are located in an area where digital billboards are less attractive. I can also imagine a very real scenario where static billboardB are removed from one district only to have a digital billboard placed in another district that has no static billboards removed. This would be unacceptable and unjust for the areas where new billboards and digital conversions would be allowed. It is unacceptable when billboards in one area are removed just to put up digital billboards several miles away. We need more equity and parity on this process.

There is no fiscal impact.

The Nexus Study and the Environmental Impact Report will be paid for by the billboard companies that opt in to participate in the digital billboards program in our City.

Approve recommendation.

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